WHISPERING SMITH

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDRE BOWLES

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Murray Sinclair and his gang of wreckers were called out to clear the railroad tracks at Smoky Creek.

CHAPTER II.—McCloud, a young road superintendent, caught Sinclair and his men in the act of looting the wrecked train. Sinclair pleaded innocence, declaring it only amounted to a small sum—a treat for the men. McCloud discharged the whole outfit and ordered the wreckage burned.

CHAPTER III.—McCloud became acquainted with Dicksie Dunning, a girl of the west, who came to look at the wreck. She gave him a message for Sinclair.

CHAPTER IV.—"Whispering" Gordon Smith told President Bucks of the railroad, of McCloud's brave fight against a gang of crazed miners and that was the reason for the superintendent's appointment to his high office. McCloud arranged to board at the boarding house of Mrs. Sinclair, the ex-foreman's deserted wife.

CHAPTER V.—Dicksie Dunning was the daughter of the late Richard Dunning, who had died of a broken heart shortly after his wife's demise, which occurred after one year of married life.

CHAPTER VI.

In Marion's Shop.

In Boney street, Medicine Bend, stands an early-day row of one-story buildings; they once made up a prosperous block, which has long since fallen into the decay of paintless days. There is in Boney street a livery stable, a second-hand store, a laundry, a bakery, a moribund grocery, and a bicycle shop, and at the time of this story there was also Marion Sinclair's millinery shop; but the better class of Medicine Bend business, such as the gambling houses, saloons, pawnshops, restaurants, barber shops, and those sensitive, clean-shaven, and alert establishments known as "gents' stores," had deserted Boney street for many years. Bats fly in the dark of Boney street while Front street at the same hour is a blaze of electricity and frontier hilarity. The millinery store stood next to the corner of Fort street. The lot lay in an "L," and at the rear of the store the first owner had built a small connecting cottage to live in. This faced on Fort street, so that Marion had her shop and living rooms communicating, and yet apart. The store building is still pointed out as the former shop of Marion Sinclair, where George McCloud boarded when the Crawling Stone line was built, where Whispering Smith might often have been seen, where Sinclair himself was last seen alive in Medicine Bend, where Dicksie Dunning's horse dragged her senseless one wild mountain night, and where, indeed, for a time the affairs of the whole mountain division seemed to tangle in very hard knots.

In her dining room, which connected through a curtained door with the shop, McCloud sat one day along eating his dinner. Marion was in front serving a customer. McCloud heard voices in the shop, but gave no heed till a man waised through the curtained doorway and he saw Murray Sinclair standing before him. A stormy interview with Callahan and Blood at the Wicklup had taken place just a week before, and McCloud after what Sinclair had then threatened, though not prepared, felt as he saw him that anything might occur. McCloud being in possession of the little room, however, the initiative fell on Sinclair, who, looking his best, snatched his hat from his head and bowed ironically. "My mistake," he said blandly.

"Come right in," returned McCloud, not knowing whether Marion had a possible hand in her husband's unexpected appearance. "Do you want to see me?"

"I don't," smiled Sinclair; "and to be perfectly frank," he added with studied consideration, "I wish to God I never had seen you. Well—you've thrown me, McCloud."

"You've thrown yourself, haven't you, Murray?"

"From your point of view, of course. But, McCloud, this is a small country for two points of view. Do you want to get out of it, or do you want me to?"

"The country suits me, Sinclair."

"No man that has ever played me dirt can stay here while I stay." Sinclair, with a hand on the portiere, was moving from the doorway into the room. McCloud in a leisurely way rose, though with a slightly flushed face, and at that juncture Marion ran into the room and spoke abruptly. "Here is the silk, Mr. Sinclair," she exclaimed, handing to him a package she had not finished wrapping. "I meant you to wait in the other room."

"It was an accidental intrusion," returned Sinclair, maintaining his irony. "I have apologized, and Mr. McCloud and I understand one another better than ever."

"Please say to Miss Dunning," continued Marion, nervous and insistent, "that the band for her riding-hat hasn't come yet, but it should be here to-morrow."

As she spoke McCloud leaned across the table, resolved to take advantage of the opening, if it cost him his life. "And by the way, Mr. Sinclair, Miss Dunning wished me to say to you that the lovely bay colt you sent her had sprung his shoulder badly, the hind shoulder, I think, but they are doing everything possible for it and they think it will make a great horse."

Sinclair's snort at the information was a marvel of indecision. Was he being made fun of? Should he draw and end it? But Marion faced him resolutely as he stood, and talking in the most business like way she backed him out of the room and to the shop door. Balked of his opportunity, he retreated stubbornly but with the utmost politeness, and left with a grin, lashing his tail, so to speak.

Coming back, Marion tried to hide her uneasiness under even tones to McCloud. "I'm sorry he disturbed you. I was attending to a customer and had to ask him to wait a moment."

"Don't apologize for having a customer."

"He lives over beyond the Stone ranch, you know, and is taking some things out for the Dunnings to-day. He likes an excuse to come in here because it annoys me. Finish your dinner, Mr. McCloud."

"Thank you, I'm done."

"But you haven't eaten anything. Isn't your steak right?"

"It's fine, but that man—well, you know how I like him and how he likes me. I'll content myself with digesting my temper."

CHAPTER VII.

Smoky Creek Bridge.

It was not alone that a defiance makes a bad dinner sauce; there was more than this for McCloud to feed on. He was forced to confess to himself as he walked back to the Wicklup that the most annoying feature of the incident was the least important,

"Here is the Silk, Mr. Sinclair."

namely, that his only enemy in the country should be intrusted with commissions from the Stone ranch and be carrying packages for Dicksie Dunning. It was Sinclair's trick to do things for people, and to make himself so useful that they must like first his obligingness and afterward himself. Sinclair, McCloud knew, was close in many ways to Lance Dunning. It was said to have been his influence that won Dunning's consent to sell a right of way across the ranch for the new Crawling Stone line. But McCloud felt it useless to disguise the fact to himself that he now had a second keen interest in the Crawling Stone country—not alone a dream of a line, but a dream of a girl. Sitting moodily in his office, with his feet on the desk, a few nights after his encounter with Sinclair, he recalled her nod as she said good-by. It had seemed the least bit encouraging, and he meditated anew on the only 20 minutes of real pleasurable excitement he had ever felt in his life, the 20 minutes with Dicksie Dunning at Smoky creek. Her intimates, he had heard, called her Dicksie, and he was vaguely envying her intimates when the night dispatcher, Rooney Lee, opened the door and disturbed his reflections.

"How is Number One, Rooney?" called McCloud, as if nothing but the thought of a train movement ever entered his head.

Rooney Lee paused. In his hand he held a message, and he faced McCloud with evident uneasiness. "Holy smoke, Mr. McCloud, here's a ripper! We've lost Smoky Creek bridge."

"Lost Smoky Creek bridge?" echoed McCloud, rising in amazement.

"Burned to-night. Seventy-seven was flagged by the man at the pump station."

"That's a tie-up for your life!" exclaimed McCloud, reaching for the message. "How could it catch fire? Is it burned up?"

"I can't get anything on that yet; this came from Canby. I'll have a good wire in a few minutes and get it all for you."

"Have Phil Hailey and Hyde notified, Rooney, and Reed and Brill Young, and get up a train. Smoky Creek bridge! By heavens, we are ripped up the back now! What can we do there, Rooney?" He was talking to himself. "There isn't a thing for it on God's earth but switchbacks and five-per-cent. grades down to the bottom of the creek and cribbing across it till the new line is ready. Wire Callahan and Morris Blood, and get everything you can for me before we start."

Ten hours later and many hundreds of miles from the mountain division, President Bucks and a companion were riding in the peace of a June morning down the beautiful Mohawk valley with an earlier and illustrious railroad man, William C. Brown. The three men were at breakfast in Brown's car. A message was brought in for Bucks. He read it and passed it to his companion, Whispering Smith, who sat at Brown's left hand. The message was from Callahan with the news of the burning of Smoky Creek bridge. Details were few, because no one on the west end could suggest a plausible cause for the fire.

"What do you think of it, Gordon?" demanded Bucks bluntly.

Whispering Smith seemed at all times bordering on good-natured surprise, and in that normal condition he read Callahan's message.

He was laughing under Bucks' scrutiny when he handed the message back. "Why, I don't know a thing about it, not a thing; but taking a long shot and speaking by and far, I should say it looks something like first blood for Sinclair," he suggested, and to change the subject lifted his cup of coffee.

"Then it looks like you for the mountains to-night instead of for Weber and Fields'," retorted Bucks, reaching for a cigar. "Brown, why have you never learned to smoke?"

CHAPTER VIII.

The Misunderstanding.

No attempt was made to minimize the truth that the blow to the division was a staggering one. The loss of Smoky creek bridge put almost 1,000 miles of the mountain division out of business. Perishable freight and time freight were diverted to other lines. Passengers were transferred; lunches were served to them in the deep valley, and they were supplied by an ingenuous advertising department with pictures of the historic bridge as it had long stood, and their addresses were taken with the promise of a picture of the ruins. The engineering department and the operating department united in a tremendous effort to bring about a resumption of traffic. Glover's men, pulled off construction, were sent forward in trainloads. Dancing's linemen strung arc lights along the creek until the canyon twinkled at night like a mountain village, and men in three shifts worked elbow to elbow unceasingly to run the switchbacks down to the creek bed. There, by cribbing across the bottom, they got in a temporary line.

McCloud spent his days at the creek and his nights at Medicine Bend with his assistant and his chief dispatcher, advising, counseling, studying out trouble reports, and steadying wherever he could the weakened lines of his operating forces. He was getting his first taste of the trials of the hardest worked and poorest paid man in the operating department of a railroad—the division superintendent.

To these were added personal annoyances. A trainload of Duck Bar steers, shipped by Lance Dunning from the Crawling Stone ranch, had been caught west of the bridge the very night of the fire. They had been loaded at Tipton and shipped to catch a good market, and under extravagant promises from the livestock agent of a quick run to Chicago. When Lance Dunning learned that his cattle had been caught west of the break and would have to be unloaded, he swore up a horse in hot hasie and started for Medicine Bend. McCloud, who had not closed his eyes for 60 hours, had just got into Medicine Bend from Smoky Creek and was sitting at his desk buried in a mass of papers, but he ordered the cattleman admitted. He was, in fact, eager to meet the manager of the big ranch and the cousin of Dicksie. Lance Dunning stood above six feet in height, and was a handsome man, in spite of the hard lines around his eyes, as he walked in; but neither his manner nor his expression was amiable.

"Are you Mr. McCloud? I've been here three times this afternoon to see you," said he, ignoring McCloud's answer and a proffered chair. "This is your office, isn't it?"

McCloud, a little surprised, answered again and civilly: "It certainly is; but I have been at Smoky Creek for two or three days."

"What have you done with my cattle?"

"The Duck Bar train was run back to Point of Rocks and the cattle were unloaded at the yard."

Lance Dunning spoke with increasing harshness: "By whose order was that done? Why wasn't I notified? Have they had feed or water?"

"All the stock caught west of the bridge was sent back for feed and water by my orders. It has all been taken care of. You should have been notified, certainly; it is the business of the stock agent to see to that. Let me inquire about it while you are here, Mr. Dunning," suggested McCloud, ringing for his clerk.

Dunning lost no time in expressing himself. "I don't want my cattle held at Point of Rocks!" he said, angrily. "Your Point of Rocks yards are infected. My cattle shouldn't have been sent there."

"Oh, no! The old yards where they had a touch of fever were burned off the face of the earth a year ago. The new yards are perfectly sanitary. The loss of the bridge has crippled us, you know. Your cattle are being well cared for, Mr. Dunning, and if you doubt it you may go up and give our men any orders you like in the matter at our expense."

"You're taking altogether too much on yourself when you run my stock over the country in this way," exclaimed Dunning, refusing to be placated. "How am I to get to Point of Rocks—walk there?"

"Not at all," returned McCloud, ringing up his clerk and asking for a pass, which was brought back in a moment and handed to Dunning. "The cattle," continued McCloud, "can be run down, unloaded, and driven around the break to-morrow—with the loss of only two days."

"And in the meantime I lose my market."

"It is too bad, certainly, but I suppose it will be several days before we can get a line across Smoky creek."

"Why weren't the cattle sent through that way yesterday? What have they been held at Point of Rocks for? I call the thing badly managed."

"We couldn't get the empty cars up from Piedmont for the transfer until to-day; empties are very scarce everywhere now."

"There always have been empties here when they were wanted until lately. There's been no head or tail to anything on this division for six months."

"I'm sorry that you have that impression."

"That impression is very general," declared the stockman, with an oath, "and if you keep on discharging the only men on this division that are competent to handle a break like this, it is likely to continue!"

"Just a moment!" McCloud's finger rose pointedly. "My failure to please you in caring for your stock in an emergency may be properly a matter for comment; your opinion as to the way I am running this division is, of course, your own; but don't attempt to criticise the retention or discharge of any man on my pay roll!"

Dunning strode toward him. "I'm a shipper on this line; when it suits me to criticise you or your methods, or anybody else's, I expect to do so," he retorted in high tones.

"But you cannot tell me how to run my business!" thundered McCloud, leaning over the table in front of him.

As the two men glared at each other Rooney Lee opened the door. His surprise at the situation amounted to consternation. He shuffled to the corner of the room, and while McCloud and Dunning engaged hotly again, Rooney, from the corner, threw a shot of his own into the quarrel. "On time!" he roared.

The angry men turned. "What's on time?" asked McCloud, curtly.

"Number One; she's in and changing engines. I told them you were going west," declared Rooney in so deep tones that his fiction would never have been suspected.

Dunning, to emphasize, without a further word, his disgust for the situation and his contempt for the management, tore into scraps the pass that had been given him, threw the scraps on the floor, took a cigar from his pocket and lighted it; insolence could do no more.

McCloud looked over at the dispatcher. "No, I am not going west, Rooney. But if you will be good enough to stay here and find out from this man just how this railroad ought to be run, I will go to bed. He can tell you, the microbe seems to be working in his mind right now," said McCloud, slamming down the roll-top of his desk. And with Lance Dunning glaring at him, somewhat speechless, he put on his hat and walked out of the room.

It was but one of many disagreeable incidents due to the loss of the bridge. Complications arising from the tie-up followed him at every turn. It seemed as if he could not get away from trouble following trouble. After 40 hours further of toil, relieved by four hours of sleep, McCloud found himself, rather dead than alive, back at Medicine Bend and in the little dining room at Marion's. Coming in at the cottage door on Fort street, he dropped into a chair. The cottage rooms were empty. He heard Marion's voice in the front shop; she was engaged with a customer. Putting his head on the table to wait a moment, nature asserted itself and McCloud fell asleep. He woke hearing a voice that he had heard in dreams. Perhaps no other voice could have wakened him, for he slept for a few minutes a death-like sleep. At all events, Dicksie Dunning was in the front room and McCloud heard her. She was talking with Marion about the burning of Smoky Creek bridge.

"Every one is talking about it yet," Dicksie was saying. "If I had lost my best friend I couldn't have felt worse; you know, my father built it. I rode over there the day of the fire, and down into the creek, so I could look up where it stood. I never realized before how high and how long it was; and when I remembered how proud father always was of his work there—Cousin Lance has often told me—I sat down right on the ground and cried. How times have changed in railroading, haven't they? Mr. Sinclair was over just the other night, and he said if they kept using this new coal in the engines they would burn up everything on the division. Do you know, I have been waiting in town three or four hours now for Cousin Lance? I feel almost like a tramp. He is coming from the west with the stock train. It was due here hours ago, but they never seem to know when anything is to get here the way things are run on the railroad now. I want to give Cousin Lance some mail before he goes through."

"The passenger trains crossed the creek over the switchbacks hours ago, and they say the emergency grades are first-rate," said Marion Sinclair, on the defensive. "The stock trains must have followed right along. Your cousin is sure to be here pretty soon. Probably Mr. McCloud will know which train he is on, and Mr. Lee telephoned that Mr. McCloud would be over here at three o'clock for his dinner. He ought to be here now."

"Oh, dear, then I must go!"

"But he can probably tell you just when your cousin will be in."

"I wouldn't meet him for worlds!"

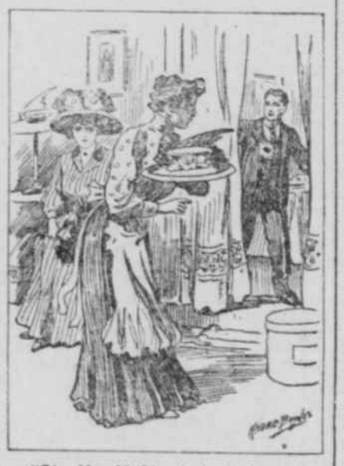
"You wouldn't? Why, Mr. McCloud is delightful."

"Oh, not for worlds, Marion! You know he is discharging all the best of the older men, the men that have made the road everything it is, and of course we can't help sympathizing with them over our way. For my part, I think it is terrible, after a man has given all of his life to building up a railroad, that he should be thrown out to starve in that way by new managers, Marion."

McCloud felt himself shrinking within his weary clothes. Resentment seemed to have died. He felt too exhausted to undertake controversy, even if it were to be thought of, and it was not.

Nothing further was needed to complete his humiliation. He picked up his hat and with the thought of getting out as quietly as he had come in. In rising he swept a tumbler at his elbow from the table. The glass broke on the floor, and Marion exclaimed: "What is that?" and started for the dining room.

It was too late to get away. McCloud stepped to the portieres of the trimming room door and pushed them aside. Marion stood with a hat in her hand, and Dicksie, sitting at the table, was looking directly at the intruder as he appeared in the doorway. She saw in him her pleasant acquaintance of the wreck at Smoky Creek, whose name she had not learned. In her surprise, she rose to her feet, and Marion



"Oh, Mr. McCloud, Is It You?"

spoke quickly: "Oh, Mr. McCloud, is it you? I did not hear you come in."

Dicksie's face, which had lighted, became a spectacle of confusion after she heard the name. McCloud, conscious of the awkwardness of his position and the disorder of his garb, said the worst thing at once: "I fear I am inadvertently overhearing your conversation."

He looked at Dicksie as he spoke, chiefly because he could not help it, and this made matters hopeless.

She flushed more deeply. "I cannot conceive why our conversation should invite a listener."

Her words did not, of course, help to steady him. "I tried to get away," he stammered, "when I realized I was a part of it."

"In any event," she exclaimed, hastily, "if you are Mr. McCloud I think it unpardonable to do anything like that!"

"I am Mr. McCloud, though I should rather be anybody else; and I am sorry that I was unable to help hearing what was said; I—"

"Marion, will you be kind enough to give me my gloves?" said Dicksie, holding out her hand.

Marion, having tried once or twice to intervene, stood between the firing-lines in helpless amazement. Her exclamations were lost; the two before her gave no heed to ordinary intervention.

McClouud flushed at being cut off, but he bowed. "Of course," he said, "if you will listen to no explanation I can only withdraw."

He went back, dinnerless, to work all night; but the switchbacks were doing capitally, and all night long trains were rolling through Medicine Bend from the west in an endless string. In the morning the yard was nearly cleared of west-bound tonnage. Moreover, the mail in the morning brought compensation. A letter came from Glover telling him not to worry himself to death over the tie-up, and one came from Bucks telling him to make ready for the building of the Crawling Stone line.

McCloud told Rooney Lee that if anybody asked for him to report him dead, and going to bed slept 24 hours.

CHAPTER IX.

Sweeping Orders.

The burning of Smoky Creek bridge was hardly off the minds of the mountain men when a disaster of a different sort befell the division. In the Rat valley east of Sleepy Cat the main line springs between two ranges of hills with a dip and a long supported grade in each direction. At the point of the dip there is a switch from which a spur runs to a granite quarry. The track for two miles is straight and the switch-target and lights are seen easily from either direction save at one particular moment of the day—a moment which is in the valley neither quite day nor quite night. Down this grade, a few weeks after the Smoky Creek fire, came a double-headed stock train from the Short Line with 40 cars of steers. The switch stood open; this much was afterward abundantly proved. The train came down the grade very fast to gain speed for the hill ahead of it. The head engineman, too late, saw the open target. He applied the emergency air, threw his engine over, and whistled the alarm. The mightiest efforts of a dozen engines would have been powerless to check the heavy train. On the quarry track stood three flat cars loaded with granite blocks for the abutment of the new Smoky Creek bridge. On a sanded track, rolling at 30 miles an hour and screaming in the clutches of the burning brakes, the heavy engines struck the switch like an avalanche, reared upon the granite-laden flats, and with 40 loads of cattle plunged into the canyon below; not a car remained on the rails. The head brakeman, riding in the second cab, was instantly killed, and the engine crews, who jumped, were badly hurt.

The whole operating department of the road was stirred. What made the affair more dreadful was that it had occurred on the time of Number Six, the east-bound passenger train, held that morning at Sleepy Cat by an engine failure. Glover came to look into the matter. The testimony of all tended to one conclusion—that the quarry switch had been thrown at some time between 4:30 and 5 o'clock that morning. Inferences were many: Tramps during the early summer had been unusually troublesome and many of them had been rigorously handled by trainmen; robbery might have been a motive, as the express cars on train Number Six carried heavy specie shipments from the coast.

A third and more exciting event soon put the quarry wreck into the background. Ten days afterward an east-bound passenger train was flagged in the night at Sugar Buttes, 12 miles west of Sleepy Cat. When the heavy train slowed up, two men boarded the engine and with pistols compelled the engineman to cut off the express cars and pull them to the water-tank a mile east of the station. Three men there in waiting forced the express car, blew open the safe, and the gang rode away half an hour later loaded with gold coin and currency.

Had a stick of dynamite been exploded under the Wicklup there could not have been more excitement at Medicine Bend. Within three hours after the news reached the town a posse under Sheriff Van Horn, with a car load of horseflesh and 14 guns, was started for Sugar Buttes. The trail led north and the pursuers rode until nearly nightfall. They crossed Dutch flat and rode single file into a wooded canyon, where they came upon traces of a camp-fire. Van Horn, leading, jumped from his horse and thrust his hand into the ashes; they were still warm, and he shouted to his men to ride up. As he called out, a rifle cracked from the box-elder trees ahead of him. The sheriff fell, shot through the head, and a deputy springing from his saddle to pick him up was shot in precisely the same way; the posse, thrown into a panic, did not fire a single shot, and for an hour dared not ride back for the bodies. After dark they got the two dead men and at midnight rode with them into Sleepy Cat.

When the news reached McCloud he was talking with Bucks over the wires. Bucks had got into headquarters at the river late that night, and was getting details from McCloud of the Sugar Buttes robbery when the superintendent sent him the news of the killing of Van Horn and the deputy. In the answer that Bucks sent came a name new to the wires of the mountain division and rarely seen even in special correspondence, but Hughie Morrison, who took the message, never forgot that name. Hughie handed the message to McCloud and stood by while the superintendent read:

Whispering Smith is due in Cheyenne to-morrow. Meet him at the Wicklup Sunday morning; he has full authority. I have told him to get these fellows, if it takes all the money in the treasury, and not to stop till he cleans them out of the Rocky Mountains. J. S. B.

CHAPTER X.

At the Three Horses.

"Clean them out of the Rocky mountains; that is a pretty good contract," mused the man in McCloud's office on Sunday morning. He sat opposite McCloud in Bucks' old easy chair and held in his hand Bucks' telegram. As he spoke he raised his eyebrows and settled back, but the unusual depth of the chair and the shortness of his legs left his chin helpless in his black tie, so that he was really no better off except that he had changed one position of discomfort for another.

A clerk opened the outer office door. "Mr. Dancing asks if he can see you, Mr. McCloud."

"Tell him I am busy."

Bill Dancing, close on the clerk's heels, spoke for himself. "I know it, Mr. McCloud, I know it!" he interposed, urgently, "but let me speak to you just a moment." Hat in hand, Bill, because no one would knock him down to keep him out, pushed into the room. "I've got a plan," he urged, "in regards to getting these hold-ups."

"How are you, Bill?" exclaimed the man in the easy chair, jumping hastily to his feet and shaking Dancing's hand. Then quite as hastily he sat down, crossed his knees violently, stared at the giant lineman, and exclaimed: "Let's have it!"

Dancing looked at him in silence and with some contempt. The trainmaster had broken in on the superintendent for a moment and the two were conferring in an undertone. "What might your name be, mister?" growled Dancing, addressing with some condescension the man in the easy chair.

The man waved his hand as if it were immaterial and answered with a single word: "Forgotten!"

"How's that?"

"Forgotten!"

Dancing looked from one man to the other, but McCloud appeared preoccupied and his visitor seemed wholly serious. "I don't want to take too much on myself—" Bill began, speaking to McCloud.

"You look as if you could carry a fair-sized load, William, provided it bore the right label," suggested the visitor, entirely amiable.

"—But nobody has felt worse over this thing and recent things—"

"Recent things," echoed the easy chair.

"—happening to the division than I have. Now I know there's been trouble on the division—"

"I think you are putting it too strong there, Bill, but let it pass."

"—there's been differences; misunderstandings and differences. So I says to myself maybe something might be done to get everybody together and bury the differences, like this: Murray Sinclair is in town; he feels bad over this thing, like any railroad man would. He's a mountain man, quick as the quickest with a gun, a good trailer, rides like a fiend, and can catch a streak of sunshine traveling on a pass. Why not put him at the head of a party to run 'em down?"

"Run 'em down," nodded the stranger.

"Differences such as be or may be—"

"May be—"

"Being discussed when he brings 'em in dead or alive, and not before. That's what I said to Murray Sinclair, and Murray Sinclair is ready for to take hold this minute and do what he can if he's asked. I told him plain I could promise no promises; that, I says, lays with George McCloud. Was I right, was I wrong? If I was wrong, right me; if I was right, say so. All I want is harmony."

The new man nodded approval. "Bully, Bill!" he exclaimed, heartily.

"Mister," protested the lineman, with simple dignity, "I'd just a little rather you wouldn't bully me nor Bill me."

"All in good part, Bill, as you shall see; all in good part. Now before Mr. McCloud gives you his decision I want to be allowed a word. Your idea looks good to me. At first I may say it didn't. I am candid; I say it didn't. It looked like setting a dog to catch his own tail. Mind you, I don't say it can't be done. A dog can catch his own tail; they do do it," proclaimed the stranger in a low and emphatic undertone. "But," he added, moderating his utterance, "when they succeed—who gets anything out of it but the dog?" Bill Dancing, somewhat clouded and not deeming it well to be drawn into any damaging admissions, looked around for a cigar, and not seeing one, looked solemnly at the new Solomon and stroked his beard. "That is how it looked to me at first," concluded the orator; "but, I say now it looks good to me, and as a stranger I may say I favor it."

Dancing tried to look unconcerned and seemed disposed to be friendly. "What might be your line of business?"

"Real estate. I am from Chicago. I sold everything that was for sale in Chicago and came here to stake out the Spanish Sinks and the Great Salt lake—yes. It's drying up and there's an immense opportunity for claims along the shore. I've been looking into it."

"Into the claims or into the lake?" asked McCloud.

"Into both; and, Mr. McCloud, I want to say I favor Mr. Dancing's idea, that's all. Right wrongs no man. Let Bill see Sinclair and see what they can figure out." And having spoken, the stranger sank back and tried to look comfortable.

"I'll talk with you later about it, Bill," said McCloud, briefly.

"Meantime, Bill, see Sinclair and report," suggested the stranger.

"It's as good as done," announced Dancing, taking up his hat, "and, Mr. McCloud, might I have a little advance for cigars and things?"

"Cigars and ammunition—of course. See Sykes, William, see Sykes; if the office is closed go to his house—and see what will happen to you—" added the visitor in an aside, "and tell him to telephone up to Mr. McCloud for instruction," he concluded, unceremoniously.

"Now why do you want to start Bill on a fool business like that?" asked McCloud, as Bill Dancing took long steps from the room toward the office of Sykes, the cashier.

"He didn't know me to-day, but he will to-morrow," said the stranger, reflectively. "Gods, what I've seen that man go through in the days of the giants! Why, George, this will keep the boys talking, and they have to do something. Spend the money; the company is making it too fast anyway; they moved 22,000 cars one day last week. Personally I'm glad to have a little fun out of it; it will be hell pure and undefiled long before we get through. This will be an easy way of letting Sinclair know I am here. Bill will report me confidentially to him as a suspicious personage."

To the astonishment of Sykes, the superintendent confirmed over the telephone Dancing's statement that he was to draw some expense money. Bill asked for $25. Sykes offered him two, and Bill with some indignation accepted five. He spent all of this in trying to find Sinclair, and on the strength of his story to the boys borrowed five dollars more to prosecute the search. At ten o'clock that night he ran into Sinclair playing cards in the big rooms above the Three Horses.

The Three Horses still rears its hospitable two-story front in Fort street, the only one of the Medicine Bend gambling houses that goes back to the days of '67; and it is the boast of its owners that since the key was thrown away, 39 years ago, its doors have never been closed, night or day, except once for two hours during the funeral of Dave Hawk. Bill Dancing drew Sinclair from his game and told him of the talk with McCloud, touching it up with natural enthusiasm. The bridgeman took the news in high good humor and slapped Dancing on the back. "Did you see him alone, Bill?" asked Sinclair, with interest. "Come over here, come along. I want you to meet a good friend. Here, Harvey, shake hands with Bill Dancing. Bill, this is old Harvey Du Sen-